

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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April 8, 1971

MEMORANDUM TO: DISTRIBUTION

FROM: Keith Guthrie

Subject: Meeting on Assessment of North Vietnamese
Capabilities in 1971-72

Attached is a record of the meeting held 11:00 a.m. April 7 in
Dr. Kissinger's office to discuss the paper assessing North Vietnamese
military capabilities in 1971-72.

Action requests by Dr. Kissinger are underscored.

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

MORI/CDF per C05099422

Attachment

Distribution: Gen. Haig
Col. Kennedy
Mr. Smith
Mr. Smyser
Mr. Sansom
Mr. Lord
Mr. Kraemer

Dr. Kissinger: I want to try to understand the figures that all of you pulled together. If I understand correctly the conclusions one can draw from the data, six more weeks and we would have been home free.

Mr. Smith: At least we would have had a better chance of being home free.

Dr. Kissinger: To sum up, you say, in effect, that with all the additional strains--non-combat consumption, combat consumption due to Lam Son, loss of caches, and loss of Sihanoukville--the enemy would need a minimum input of 80,000 tons. This has to be related to an estimated trail capacity of 74,000-89,000 tons.

Mr. Sansom: Our inputs requirement estimate is 87,000-90,000 tons.

Dr. Kissinger: According to your analysis, if they operate the trail at full capacity, they will just about make it [meet their requirement].
(to Smith and Sansom) Do a projection on what the effect would have been if Lam Son had been continued four more weeks. That way I will know what I am weeping about.

Mr. Sansom: In making such an analysis you have to take into account the additional cost.

Dr. Kissinger: The analysis makes a number of assumptions favorable to the enemy, such as calculating extra consumption on the basis of 10,000 troops rather than 20,000.

Mr. Sansom: CIA's conclusions are based on the lower estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: You adjusted the estimates to get the maximum enemy requirement. On bomb damage, leaving aside the question of number of trucks killed, if it is assumed that more were killed [because of the increased gunship effort] this year, then a 35% [bomb damage assessment] figure ought to be about the right figure this year. That is, if 4,300 truck kills were claimed last year when a figure of 25% was used, then if the claimed kill this year is 8,000, a 35% [BDA] figure would not be unreasonable, even if their [the gunship pilots'] veracity has declined.

Mr. Sansom: I am not sure about the percentage, but the figure should be higher this year.

Also the CIA bomb damage assessment figure does not take into account bomb destruction due to Lam Son.

Mr. Smith: The figures could be off both on truck kills and on bomb damage due to Lam Son.

Dr. Kissinger: In your analysis, every uncertainty has been resolved in favor of the enemy.

Mr. Sansom: Except with regard to ARVN reporting on destruction of caches.

Dr. Kissinger: And they never lie about that. It is not in their national character.

I take it that 13,000-ton ammunition dump was not counted.

Mr. Smith: Admiral Moorer said that the total of supplies lost to the enemy was quite small.

Gen. Haig: These were combat supplies. They are not countable. The amount is minuscule.

Dr. Kissinger: I trust Tom Moorer on logistics. But why can't we get out of MACV an estimate of how many supplies were dropped and how many were left behind?

Mr. Sansom: And how much would have been usable to the enemy.

Dr. Kissinger: Under the most favorable assumptions for the enemy and assuming that the trail can be used to maximum capacity, the enemy will just about make it [meet his requirement]. And this doesn't allow for the disruption of the trail system due to Lam Son. All the uncertainties could be working in our favor. If trail capacity this year is less than the maximum, they won't make it.

Mr. Sansom: The estimate is a conservative one.

Dr. Kissinger: What if the capacity is less than 84,000 tons?

Mr. Sansom: Then they will have to cut back their operations.

Dr. Kissinger: What about the predictions for 1972? We don't want to get burned at that time. However, given the agility of some of my colleagues--senior colleagues--I will probably be the last man on the boat. The Secretary of State on Meet the Press the other day said that he didn't want to comment on the situation in Vietnam because the President had covered it so well.

You give four variants [for possible enemy activity in 1972]. Are you assessing whether the enemy can do any one of these or whether he can do a combination of them?

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Mr. Sansom: The variants include combinations.

Dr. Kissinger: I take it that the North Vietnamese can in any event carry out a protracted warfare strategy.

Mr. Sansom: Yes.

Dr. Kissinger: An on top of that they have the capability for one of the four variants.

Mr. Sansom: They have the capability for all variants except [under certain conditions] a countrywide offensive or an offensive in both MR 1 and Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: When could they do this?

Mr. Sansom: Sometime during the year.

Dr. Kissinger: May? February? August?

Mr. Sansom: Late in the dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: The MR 1-offensive variant would require an input of 66,000 tons.

Mr. Sansom: That is the midpoint estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: A Cambodian offensive would require 72,000 tons. An offensive in both MR 1 and Cambodia would be strapping them.

Mr. Sansom: Yes, they would be very pressed.

Dr. Kissinger: How do you define a countrywide offensive?

Mr. Sansom: A simultaneous major offensive in every MR plus Cambodia.

Dr. Kissinger: How come protracted warfare requires 66,000 tons, an offensive in MR 1 requires 72,000 tons (an increase of 6,000 tons), but a countrywide offensive requires an additional increment [over that required for an MR 1 offensive] of only 3,000 tons?

Mr. Sansom: The enemy's major consumption requirement is in MR. 1.

Dr. Kissinger: Why is that?

Mr. Sansom: Most of our forces are there, and most of their forces are there.

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Dr. Kissinger: What about South Vietnamese forces?

Mr. Sansom: CIA assumed there would be a certain number of battalions in each MR.

Dr. Kissinger: What are the adjusted estimates?

Mr. Sansom: In South Laos the CIA says that the enemy built up his forces by 20,000. They say there is no evidence that they will feel free to cut those forces in 1972. The key contingency is whether there is a credible threat of another Lam Son. If there isn't, they may cut their forces. The adjusted estimate takes account of such a possible cut.

Dr. Kissinger: According to the adjusted estimate, the enemy can do anything they want next year.

Mr. Sansom: From the standpoint of logistics, but not from that of manpower.

Dr. Kissinger: Then what is the gain from Lam Son?

Mr. Smith: It gained us this year.

Mr. Sansom: And part of next year. To get the full benefit of Lam Son, it might be necessary to execute another Lam Son next year.

Mr. Smith: The threat [of another Lam Son] will have to be kept credible.

Dr. Kissinger: Can you give me an estimate of when the enemy will be ready? Of course, even though they could launch an offensive, they would not necessarily win.

Mr. Lord: What do you mean by a general offensive in MRs 3 and 4?

Mr. Sansom: Ten to fifteen days of multi-battalion ground attacks. The exact number of battalions is in the CIA estimate.

Dr. Kissinger: That would not be enough to crack the South Vietnamese.

Mr. Smith: These estimates are bounded by what would be required to duplicate the Tet offensive. They would only need an additional 5,000-8,000 tons to do that.

Dr. Kissinger: But what will they get for it?

Mr. Sansom: They couldn't mount a major offensive until late in the dry season.

Dr. Kissinger: Will you look into the timing? Put a time on it.

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Dr. Kissinger: Give me a time and an estimate of the probable chances for success.

Mr. Smith: For each offensive [variant]?

Dr. Kissinger: Yes.

Mr. Sansom: The assumptions underlying these estimates postulate that many conditions will be the same as last year. However, there are a lot of things that might be done to improve the situation for friendly forces.

Dr. Kissinger: It is clear we have to try some interdiction.

Mr. Smith: Again we should remember that the assumptions used are generally the most favorable to the enemy. There are many things that could be worked on to improve the situation.

Dr. Kissinger: My objective is to understand what is the worst, the best, and the probable outcome. I need to have that in a day or so. Then we are going to have a meeting of the WSAG or the SRG or whatever. I need a paper over the weekend. I am never again going to let us slide into something like Lam Son if we are not willing to do everything that it is necessary to do.

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